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Popular Culture: A Dyed-in-the-Wool Hegemony Which Stemmed “Otherness”

Abstract : This paper demands the need of recognition by the indigenous people of post-colonial countries about the great flux in culture which smokes up the aboriginal culture and appeals to the European, which is believed to be the elite one, and is been relocated as the popular culture. The irony is that once, the elite culture was accepted by a small group within the country and the so called low culture belonged to those of mass group which thus was the popular culture. This status got reversed and it's really a whole new ball game now. Why the larger group culture detained and a culture belonging to the smaller group respectable or prestigious and acceptable? The colonized mind of the people results in such a run behind the idea that European culture is superior and modern which raised its popularity by deconstructing our own culture. Likewise, this subjugation before the hegemony of culture enabled to hijack our indigenous culture and is been manufactured by the hands of hegemonic group. Here raised an intensely inquisitive mind of whether the natives are getting lost in this new swing. Can they pin up themselves, with their own cultural values in the society? Lets walk along with the African post colonial writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and his works to prove that cultural acceptance should be done by recognizing and evaluating its distinctiveness and with the sensibility of Ourness to find it as a blessing in disguise.

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Keywords – acceptance, elite culture, hegemony, indigenous, popular culture post-colonial.

1. Introduction

Flux is a natural praxis which is always a trespasser into a society. This can't be restrained in any means. Though it is inevitable for its advancement, the concernment lies in the influence of such intrusions which may cause a re-adaptation the originality of the cultural root that firmly holds the identity of that particular society. Empowerment or improvement could never be misunderstood by complete reconstruction of the elementary aspects of social vitality, which is essentially one's own culture. So flux should never smoke screen the particularities and uniqueness of that society. As this uniqueness makes the selfhood of the society, the popular culture must stand by it. Lamentably, we can see Euro-centricity in the acceptability of culture, which is believed to be the privileged one. In the period of colonialism, the mode of implementing imperial power was not necessarily through military and legal measures. It was also done through cultural imperialism by putting down their native culture, language and art to be called it primitive claiming theirs as superior. This idea that European culture is superior is something we colonized subjects started to accept as superior, modern and prestigious.

This calls up the need of a study in this affair. The works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer is relevant as the frame of reference, which serves the whole essence of self respect and inclination towards one's own country and its dignity. Ngugi is a writer who always stood as a spokesman for his society, culture and language. His works like 'Writers in politics', 'Decolonising the Mind', 'A Grain of Wheat', 'Homecoming' and all are much applicable for the purpose.

2. Background:

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his book 'Writers in Politics', he suggests to the writers and intellectuals the task of going back to the roots with the aim of restoring the African personality to its true creative potentials in history, so as to enhance the quality of life. His quest for the cultural root of Africa especially Kenya penetrates in his works, which always has gifted the warmth of it. To hold on this warmth he found it superior to choose the native language Gikuyu of Kenya for his writings believing that it could display the true expression of the real flesh and blood of Kenyan culture. Thus in the statement prefixed to 'Decolonising the Mind', Ngugi declared that – "This book, 'Decolonising the Mind', is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way." He added, "As a writer in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as medium of expression. I have endeavoured in my words to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people. In order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English."

Ngugi's nonfictional writing explores subject matter familiar to his novels, including cultural and linguistic imperialism of west, the loss of traditional African culture, and the effect of Christianity on tribal communities. The essays in 'Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture Politics' emphasize the important social function of African literature.

3. Critical Analysis:

Are we really decolonized in all sense? This question arises by charging each postcolonial countries of their averseness with not being comfortable and agreeable to its own selfdom. Why? The reason is that we are still chained up with the cultural hegemony of European culture, something which they have seeded inside our mind. It's truly quoted by Ngugi, " Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; those who strive to build a protective wall around it, and those who wish to pull it down; those who seek to mould it and those committed to breaking it up; those who aim to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow, and those who wish to lull us into closing our eyes." Yes, we are been lulled in the fascination of so called cultural hegemony which has allured us by closing our eyes towards the real charm of the indigenous culture. As Ngugi cried out in his 'Decolonising the Mind', it's time to break up the chains of our mind from the ethos, attitude and inclination towards the superiority of the other culture, who has shown no reluctance to stamp out our wonderful and treasured culture imaging it as 'Other' and defaming as simply barbarians and uncultured. This sense of mediocrity within was the real invader of the colonized subjects right from the beginning and made room for the imperial power to rule upon us in the title of white man's burden. The question is, are we still preparing room for them? Are we ourselves getting marginalized under the great trend of 'flux in culture' and are we selling the piety of our culture by popularizing the European

culture? The answer is quite confusing, as the reminiscences of Europe are found in dispersion throughout. Actually at the time of withdrawal, British people had the least expectation in the plantation of the seeds which they have sown in each colony. Ngugi's character John Thomson, in 'A Grain of Wheat' shows this anxiety about the research station which he was going to leave back in Kenya on the day of Uhuru and was relocating from there, saying, "Would these things remain after Thursday? Perhaps for two months: and then test tubes and beakers would be broken or lie unwashed on the cement, the hot-house and seed beds strewn with wild plants and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed, put gradually creep into a litter filled compound." Such was our strife and animosity against them. They feared the united strength of the colonized subjects, their sense of individuality, their power of harmony and originality. In 'A Grain of Wheat' Ngugi quoted, "Our fathers fought bravely. But do you know the biggest weapon unleashed by the enemy against them? It was not the Maxim gun. It was division among them. Why? Because a people united in faith are stronger than the bomb." This was the tactics applied to settle down their fear. Till now, though politically free, we are prostrating our own culture and its values in front of the 'Maxim gun' which has taken a new disguise of popular culture. This situation calls up the valuable words of Frantz Fanon who stressed on the rediscovery of the identity by the marginalized people by calling it as the 'passionate research' and "directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-concept, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others." Identity is not as explicit or uncomplicated as we perceive. It should be taken as production process to be carried on till its ultimate outcome than as an accomplished fact. In order to attain completeness in this research of identity one should lay claim on his cultural identity. This is found to be a problematic claim for the natives. Actually, why? As Fanon puts it, "Colonization is not satisfied merely with holding a people

in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it." This destructed and disfigured past has become a shameful repression for the natives by evaluating it through the perspective of the British colonists who imposed the notion of cultureless, savage, uncivilized culture to be owned by their forefathers. The most pathetic reality is that such notions are been accepted by this generation with the surety of hearing on the grapevine. So a strong need of empowerment for the natives on their enriched past culture is very necessary, to built a reinforced basement which can promise a strong future. Ngugi wo Thiong'o's statement, "Why did Africa let Europe cart away millions of Africa's souls from the continent to the four corners of the wind? How Europe lord it over a continent ten times its size? Why does needy Africa continue to let its wealth meet the needs of those outside its borders and then follow behind with hands outstretched for a loan of the very wealth it let go? How did we arrive at this, that the best leader is that the one that knows how to beg for a share of what he has already given away at the price of a broken tool? Where is the future of Africa?" gives a great support to this argument. The irony is that colonized are still colonized with the deep seated phobia of subjugation which admits the false impression of the world that such colonies are dark, mysterious and savages. Such ironies stems from the permission granted by the indigenous people for the indulgence and acceptance of foreign culture by subjugating one's own identity which is his own culture. As Homi Bhabha assessed "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye". The myths of time is influenced to lose the self culture by the gradual acceptance of new cultures, especially the European one which is been attracted due to its elite expression in the world of culture, and thus lost the real boundaries by just leaving back a geographical boundary. This created a lacunae in the cultural formation of the post colonial countries and naturally this lacunae was and is been still filled up by the hegemonic cultures.

The need for scooping out the real other culture and refilling the original culture arouses now. How can this be done? Only by making up each citizens mind to accept our indigenous culture, realize its richness and to lift it up to the extent of one's own identity and thus signing in the cultural identity, can do it. As such acceptance of original identity supports the acceptance of any group of people who belongs to his country regardless of his race, religion, cast , creed or any of such discriminations, this can in turn rename each marginalized gatherings of a post colonial country from 'other' to 'own'.

4. Conclusion:

The need to recheck the trend of popular culture is been pointed out. Popular culture has created a great impact on the question of self identity. That loss is quite discreditable which is caused by the negligence from the part of indigenous people. This paper call upon the dead homegrown culture to awake and represent itself by exposing its warmth, value and gentility to do over the present day popular culture and make up the natives to accept their own culture as the best one. The above excerpts from the literary works of post-colonial writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o drives home the point that the cultural hegemony undoubtedly has influence and impact over the natal culture. The impact is so deep rooted that most of them does not even realize the fact of the matter. Instead of accepting one's own culture which is a person's or a nation's own identity we are moved by the imposition of the foreign culture just by dint of the popularity it causes in the sphere. The aura brought into existence by the present popular culture is over and over wiping out the original identity which can't be a granted. Culture is an evolving phenomenon and is thus bound to undergo flux. Flux is inevitable in a society and also acceptable, but should be for the development and construction of one's selfness, not for the reinforcement of the fear which deconstructs, deteriorates and as a result marginalizes the society by pushing it to the pit of 'Otherness'. This cultural crisis could be faced by lifting up one's country or nation to catch a position in the world with complete trust in the richness

of its own culture by undertaking the task of the pedagogue educating the yet unformed citizens, by performing the nation itself and renaming the so called fourth to third, third to second and second to first world countries.

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